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### Contemporary Politics in Latin America: Anti-Political Bolsonaro's Speech

*Política contemporánea en América Latina: discurso antipolítico de Bolsonaro*

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#### RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza los procesos políticos contemporáneos en Brasil, especialmente el proceso de reformular la expresión "jugar a la política". Los autores examinan los temas involucrados en este proceso de cambios políticos, la relación entre política, democracia y el concepto de un Estado de derecho democrático. Como el presidente Bolsonaro es un actor considerable de política en toda América Latina, no solo Brasil, se presta especial atención a su actividad y discurso político público.

**Palabras clave:** Brasil, Bolsonaro, democracia, ideología.

#### ABSTRACT

This article analyses the contemporary political processes in Brazil, especially the process of reframing the expression "to play politics". Authors examine the subjects involved in this process of political changes, the relationship between politics, democracy, and the concept of a democratic State of law. As the president, Bolsonaro is a considerable actor in politics in all Latin America, not only in Brazil, a special attention is made to his activity and public political discourse.

**Keywords:** Brazil, Bolsonaro, democracy, ideology.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In a comprehensive quotation, the term politics is related to a process related to the act of making decisions and which, under the force of law, will be applied to all members of a human community. Politics as an act of relations between communities and societies also applies to matters not only internal to a State (Domestic policy) but also external matters (foreign relations) (Brandt et al.: 2017, pp. 64-87; Rousseau: 1816).

Morphologically, this word originates from the Greek word "politikḗ" [sc. Tékhḗ] and was related to the organization of the Greek Polis, or City-states, this meaning also expands to the Greek term "politikós" that makes reference to "citizen" or what "belongs to the citizen", to the "inhabitant of a City-state". Later, in the 13th century, it also started to mean "[science] of the State's relations.", consequently, over the centuries, other meanings were added to it, we can say that its meaning was adapted to the needs of each era (Saviani: 2018).

A peculiar point in the analysis of the term over the centuries, at least in Brazilian societies, is the fact that the term has gradually lost its practical and everyday meaning and has come to refer almost exclusively to matters related to the State, government, and politicians. Here it is worth mentioning that the term "Politician" has become practically a term related to a kind of profession. Brazilians, in general, understand that the terms politics and politicians carry a significant pejorative burden.

Johannes Althusius, a German Calvinist philosopher and theologian, published one of the theories of the conception of Politics as matters related to the organization of States, in a modern conception, it can be divided into several layers or smaller institutions (Althusius: 1997) that play a powerful role in controlling somehow the way people will live and behave.

## **METHODS**

The research methodology is based on the comparative approach, historical and social structuralism methods that allow us to determine the stages and patterns of formation of political discourse as a part of political activity. The analysis of discourse is also taken as the basis of the methodology, along with comparative political analysis.

## **RESULTS**

### **The relationship between politics and power**

Politics is part of human praxis and cannot be separated from the concept of power, as politics is a form of manifestation of the power that a person (the politician) exercises over another person or a group of people, society, or community. In practice, when we elect a ruler, whatever it may be, we grant this person a type of power that will be used over us, even in case of "right democracy" (Ilikova: 2019, pp. 129-139). This subject will make use of these attributions and power to somehow influence our behavior, our way of understanding, and organizing the society in which we are inserted. This is political power.

Political power takes advantages of the possibility of resorting to force as a form of self-preservation, we emphasize that the power in question is a personified figure of authority - the person in charge, except in non-democratic regimes or where there is a constant violation of human rights, the use of force is found in the field of possibilities, this type of power becomes an obscure form of coercion, leading people to behave in a way that does not disturb political power (Alvarez & Escobar: 2018, pp. 317-330).

## **The ideological power**

Ideological power is structured and based on its ability to influence the conduct and behavior of other people. This type of influence is only effective due to the political power that holds authority from the State (Bobbio: 1997). When analyzing ancient societies, several institutions held for some time both ideological and political power, at different degrees and at different times. In the middle Ages, for example, the state held political power, while the church held ideological power, if any citizen denied, for example, ideological power, the church required the use of political power to “punish” the unbeliever physically.

Since the Enlightenment, ideological power has also extended to intellectuals and scientists, as the sciences gained a preponderant status in the political life of society, greatly influencing people's behavior. Science proposes to answer for the mysteries of life in opposition to the ideological power of the middle Ages that explained life as mystery based on faith.

## **Social organization, political actors, and political practice.**

A social organization or social institution is any structure based on social order, responsible for governing the behavioral sphere of a collective of citizens within a certain group. Social organization is a sociological concept defined as a pattern of relationships between individuals and groups. This organization is divided into layers and spheres, and each layer or sphere is responsible for several functions such as workforce, leadership, politics, religion, or education and exists based on cohesion and space-time.

These social structures are organized by a social purpose that can ignore the individual interests of a person, it means that collective interests override individual interests, and each government or figure with political power can impose rules that will govern the behavior of a person or community.

Political actors are elected by society in an electoral process based on their proposals for a predetermined term, political actors who are awarded the key to political power may or may not have the support of the greatest holder of ideological power, it will depend on much of the political positioning of the political actor and how this person interacts with the different layers of society.

In the Brazilian political scenario, political actors must have public contact with religious institutions, since religion is a very important institution in the field of ideological power, as its leaders, in general, are always associated with a political segment, to a political position. Religious leaders have a very unique power over the member of the religious community.

And this ability to associate with leadership or social segment with ideological power was perceived in Jair Bolsonaro's speech during his election campaign. He then declared Roman Catholic apostle began to associate his image not only with the Catholic niche but with all religions originating from Christianity. If analyzing only the Christian niche of Brazil, we will see that, according to IBGE [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics] data, in 2019, approximately 87% of Brazilians declare themselves to be Christians and vote based on Christian values, in other words, the candidate must present himself as a Christian to receive a significant percentage of the votes in that niche.

Throughout the electoral campaign, Bolsonaro insisted on the motto “Brazil above everything, God above everyone”, this motto won the trust of the vast majority of Christians. Bolsonaro then began to align his discourse with this niche discourse: anti-progressive discourse, anti-PT discourse, anti-feminist agendas, anti-abortion, anti-homosexuality, centralization of power in a messianic figure [the president himself] and everything that could be linked to anti-politics.

The term “to play politics” has gained strength in recent years in the Brazilian scenario due to the corruption scandals exposed by Lava-Jato, during this investigative process, practically all political parties were accused of participating somehow in some corruption scheme. People started to associate the term to play politics with everything wrong and immoral in the federal parliament.

During the 2018 election campaigns, practically all the figures who were democratically elected for a four-year term, who were entrusted with political power, used anti-political and anti-politician discourse, many outsiders used to say “I am a manager, I am not a politician”. This type of speech echoed positively in the

imagination of the Brazilian electorate, these people believed that the country was devastated by corruption due to the decades of people who were almost professional politicians. This shift towards an anti-political movement was strong enough for there to be a relatively large renovation in the composition not only of the Brazilian parliament but in many other spheres of the states of the Federation.

In the imagination of the Brazilian electorate, "to play politics" is still strongly associated with blackmail, illegality. Any political agent who tries to enter the field of political discourse is accused of "playing politics", and soon loses all credibility, even if temporarily.

### **Interweaving between democratic State of law, democracy, and anti-political discourse**

The term "democratic State of law" brings us back to a basic concept regarding the existence of the figure of the State as an entity that exists and governs a society. The term "democracy" basically means "government of the people", that is, in a democratic state, the people exercise power, and the people are entrusted with political power. The term "of Law" refers to what kind of law will exercise the role of limiting the exercise of the political power of the State, in other words, that term limits the State's power over citizens. It is a legal attempt to prevent the State from oppressing the citizen.

In a modern conception, it is extremely complicated to understand the extension of a democratic State of Law, since it is the State, in many cases, that edits the rules of its action and oppression. On the other hand, if the State delegates the right to decisions to individuals, this individual will also be at risk of oppression, but in this case, coming from other individuals or anti-democratic instances. So the relationship between the people and the State must always be under surveillance to prevent the one to annihilate the other, and in this spy-game, the State will always have greater power compared to the power of a citizen (Ferreira Filho: 2017).

It is important to emphasize that the State by itself does not exist, because as a legal entity, a person must receive political power and the State will be personified in this person. It is precisely in this context that democracy ceases to be understood literally and takes on other meanings. The word democracy originates from the Greek word δημοκρατία [demokratía], which is formed by two words: δῆμος [démōs], which means 'people', and κράτος [krátos], which means 'power'. Thus, democracy means "people's power" (Saviani: 2018). In the Brazilian scenario, people have a responsibility to elect their leaders. The Electoral Court, composed of ministers who are not elected by direct vote, is in charge of organizing and executing the entire electoral process, supervising and validating or not that process.

The elected candidate incorporates the figure of the State and holds political power and, in many cases, ideological power for a four-year term. It seems to be the attempt to direct democracy, as in Italy the "5 stars Movement" tried to do (Ilikova: 2019, pp. 129-139; Botelho: 2002). In the organization of the Brazilian State, it is not possible for the people to fully exercise power, in other words, "the power is not on the people's hand". The people exercise symbolic vigilance, as it is always the State that determines the rules of the State-people relationship. So we can understand, in this scenario that democracy is a state in which people have the right to elect their leaders through direct election mechanisms, but they do not have the political power to prevent the State from taking decisions contrary to the wishes of society.

### **DISCUSSION**

At this point, we can think of legal mechanisms to remove a leader from power, the impeachment, but this mechanism will only be used in circumstances of flagrant violation of the obligations of that person in power or for purely political reasons, with no obvious relation to legal reasons - violations or crimes. If the act of playing politics is intertwined with the act of building a participatory democracy, where all those involved, observing the legal peculiarities, can exercise state surveillance functions and, even if theoretically, they have got mechanisms to stop any abuse of power or deprivation any kind of freedom, the emergence, and

consolidation of an anti-political discourse, which in some way re-signifies the Brazilian political scene as a whole, is extremely peculiar.

This trend is not disconnected from anti-democratic tendencies, since we observe today in many societies, such as the Hungarian one, for example, an anti-democratic formation process that is repeatedly updated by equally anti-democratic political choices (Reis: 1998, pp. 187-203; Fair: 2012), this occurs when the people, exercise their voting power, legal in the eyes of the Law, to elect other people, to attribute political and ideological power to people who have got no clear link with the maintenance of a democratic State of law. In this way, they seek to disconnect the first from any relationship with politics, then they deny political discourse, finally associating political discourse with other people notoriously linked to politics with acts of illegality and great social, moral, religious harm, economic and many other nuances.

An anti-political discourse is averse to politics and politicians, repudiates the way politics is played within a socio-historical period and tends to break human political activity which is, in a more figurative sense, the ability to relate with others, to obtain desired results and respect the will and freedoms of other members of a community (Lubenow: 2018, pp. 141-154; Castells: 2018).

This reframing may end up in serious consequences, as it can give the impression that the Brazilian State currently needs people without commitment to politics, public policies, and the federal constitution. This may mean a great deal of institutional instability, since voters can demand that the person with the political power fail to observe the rules of the democratic State of law and transgress to an autocratic anti-political State, and that power is validated and granted to a person by a large number of people.

This individual who does not have the image of the traditional politician, who presents him[her]self as an alternative to the state quo can in many cases represent not only the emergence of an anti-political political discourse, but also the rupture of plural political relations that are essential for maintaining democracy, freedom of expression and thought, in a comprehensive meaning, the fundamental freedoms, and, consequently, a not only semantic rupture of the term "democratic State of law".

## **CONCLUSION**

Brazil is currently undergoing a process of rethinking traditional ideas about politics, political actors, activities, and discourses. The change in Brazil's traditional "left" course in recent decades, which is characteristic of many Latin American countries, leads to the disappointment of a significant part of the electorate in current political activity. The usual "left" politics in Brazil was replaced by the political agenda of right-wing populism, which was initially perceived with the hope of changes and improvements in the economy and social life.

At the same time, the changes taking place in Brazil now can lead to an increase in institutional instability, a loss of the foundations of a democratic rule of law, and a transition to authoritarianism and state populism. These political processes are very important for the analysis and understanding of political processes throughout Latin America because Brazil is a key factor because of its geographical and economic position in the region.

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